

The seventh trumpet now has been blown. The third woe has come. But unlike the previous two trumpets, this is not a terrifying picture that we see here. It's not full of strange creatures and strange happenings. But rather what John sees or hears are loud voices coming down out of heaven. And I like to think that they were singing when they said what they said. I think I probably only think that because these words were used as part of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus, which we all know very well. Verse 15 of our reading says: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." The kingdom has come! The world belongs to God and to his Christ! It's hard not to sing in a case like that.

But this might be a little bit confusing to us, because it seems like here in Revelation 11 that God is only just beginning to reign, as if his kingdom was only coming for the first time. Even in verse 17, the twenty-four elders say that God has now begun to reign with the blowing of the seventh trumpet. But isn't God already king? Don't we call him the king? Revelation even says earlier in the book that God is on the throne. So why does it seem like it's only now that the kingdom is coming? Why does it seem like it's only now that God is King?

It's because in one sense, Christians, we do live in the kingdom now. God reigns as King over all things. But in another sense, we are still waiting for the kingdom to come, when God will be king over all. It all depends on what we mean by kingdom when we talk about the kingdom of God.

I think the best way to understand this is to first understand what the kingdom of God is not. The kingdom of God is not like an earthly kingdom. It does not have borders. It does not have a domain in which we can go to. It's not like we can point on a map and say that the kingdom of God is over here, and that it's not over here. But that's how we normally think about kingdoms, isn't it? With their borders and their different lands. The United Kingdom, for example, is far away over the Atlantic. If I wanted to go to Great Britain, I'd have to get on a boat or on an airplane and go over there. It's not like England has any power or authority over here. I am not part of that kingdom. And that's the way earthly kingdoms are. They're limited to one place in the world.

But the kingdom of God is not like that, Christians. The kingdom of God is something different. Jesus makes this perfectly clear when he's talking to Pilate in John chapter 18. He says: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Pilate can only think in terms of worldly kingdoms, but the kingdom of God is not a worldly kingdom. It is not from this world.

So I think the best way to understand what the Bible means by kingdom is to think of it as the rule of God, that he reigns over us as King. We can understand this even in terms of an earthly kingdom. If I am part of a kingdom, that means that I submit to the king. He is the one who rules over me. He is my lord. And no matter where I am in the world, even if I'm on vacation or traveling in some distant part of the world, I am still subject to that king, because he rules over me. Because that is where he has been placed. And so the same is also true of the kingdom of God, Christians. God rules over as King, and no matter where I am in the world, or in the entire universe for that matter, God is still the Lord and always will be.

This is why we can say that we live in the kingdom now. Because on the one hand, God is the creator, and he's king because he is the creator. All things belong to him. Without him nothing would exist. Even if no one believed in him, God would still be King. This is why our Psalm for this evening says, Psalm 47: "For the Lord, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth." Nothing can ever change that fact.

But God is King especially for those who believe in him. In that sense, we can say that the kingdom of God is the Church. And this is often how Jesus talks about the kingdom in the Gospels. In Matthew chapter 4, for example, he says: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Whenever we repent, whenever we believe in the Gospel, we become part of the kingdom. And Jesus often starts his parables in that way too: "The kingdom of heaven is like . . ." So wherever believers are, Christians, that's where the kingdom of God is. Wherever believers are, God is reigning as King. We live in the kingdom even now.

But when we think of the kingdom in that way, it also helps us to understand how the kingdom is still coming too. Because not everybody believes in God. Not everyone has submitted to him. Hebrews chapter 2 says: "At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him." So the kingdom has not yet been fully established. God will be all in all. He will be over all things, and all will bow to him. But we're still waiting for that to happen, when Christ will come and no one will oppose him, when Christ will come and finally put all things under his feet. So we have to wait for that day. We have to wait for the day when Christ will finally bring things to their completion. We are still waiting for the kingdom of God.

But waiting is not always easy for us, especially when we see a world which is so full of evil. When we see a world at war, for example, a world which is torn apart by fighting, where we hear about all kinds of terrible stories that come through the news, it often wants to make us pray for the coming of the Prince of Peace, when the world will beat its swords into plowshares and will learn war no more. When we see a world which is full of corruption and evil, even at the very highest levels of society, it makes us want to pray for the coming of the King of Righteousness, who will bring perfect justice and set all things right. When we see a world which fights against the Church, which persecutes those who trust in God, it makes us want to pray for the coming of the King of Zion, who will deliver his people from all of their troubles. Yes, Christians, when we see all of these things, I think we've all at one time or another wished that God would just bring it all to an end. Because we're tired. We're tired of war. We're tired of fighting with the world. We're tired of corruption. We're tired of evil. We wish it would just all be over. We wish that the kingdom would just come, that God would deal with all of these things once and for all. And yet still we wait. How long is it going to be, O Lord? How long before your kingdom comes?

But even though we wait, Christians, the kingdom will come. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. The kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And on that day when Jesus comes, there will be no more war. There will be no more corruption. There will be no more suffering. There will be no more evil. On that day, he will destroy the destroyers of the earth. On that day, he will deliver his people from all of their troubles. On that day, he will bring them into the kingdom prepared for them from before the foundation of the world. And never again will anyone fight against him. Never again will sin raise its ugly head. Never again will anything hurt

or harm his people. He will be the King of Kings and the Lord of lords, and his kingdom will last forever and ever.

But while we wait for that day, Christians, God gives us reassurance that this will in fact happen. He says in verse 19 of our reading: "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail." The ark of the covenant, of course, was the box, the golden box, that Moses made. And into it, he put things like the tablets of the Ten Commandments and several other things besides. And God promised that wherever that ark was, he would be also. That that's where Israel could go to meet their God. In fact, he says, Exodus chapter 25: "There I will meet with you,"--talking about the ark--"and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony." Wherever the ark was, Israel knew that God would be with them. Wherever the ark was, Israel knew that God would be faithful to the promises that he made. All they had to do was look and see that ark.

But by the time John wrote the book of Revelation, the ark was long gone. It was probably destroyed by the Babylonians when they destroyed Jerusalem and destroyed the temple at the same time. But that ark was only a copy, Christians. It was an earthly copy of the true ark, the one that John now sees. And if the earthly ark could show Israel that God was with them, if the earthly ark could show Israel that God would always keep his promises, how much more so the heavenly one, which is with God above and which is where moth and rust cannot destroy and thieves cannot break in and steal. It will never pass away.

And even more than this picture, Christians--because it is still just a picture--we have the clear promises of God himself. He says in Isaiah [45]: "By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'" God will be all in all. Nothing can stop the coming of the kingdom. Nothing can stop the final victory of God!

So Christians, be patient. Christ will put all things under his feet. And all the evil that we see in the world today will finally be defeated, no matter how terrible it may seem right now. And in the day when our king returns, in the day when the kingdom finally comes, our joy will never come to an end. So trust in him. He will not fail. The King is coming! The kingdom will soon be here. Get ready to meet him!

Let us pray. King of Kings and Lord of Lords, to whom all things belong and from whom all things exist, let your kingdom come, and bring an end to all evil, so that we may be at peace in you forever. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.